

# PRACTITIONER GUIDE

## Strategy Discussions

A strategy discussion is a multi-agency discussion that is held to determine a child's welfare and plan rapid future action, if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. The discussion should be used to:

- Share, seek and analyse available information.
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation.
- Consider whether enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 should be undertaken.

It is important to note that some cases may require more than one strategy discussion to be held, in order for the above decisions to be made.

### When is a strategy discussion needed?

A strategy discussion should be held whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during the assessment process and when new information is received on an already open case. A strategy discussion should also be held if there is an allegation against staff, volunteers or foster carers. The Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) and designated Police Officer at the Public Protection Unit should be informed.



### Who should attend a strategy discussion?

A strategy discussion should take place within **24 hours of the initial referral** or identification of concern. In Hampshire this discussion is convened by a Children's Social Care team manager. As a minimum, the following professionals should be involved in the strategy discussion to ensure quoracy:

- A local authority social worker (including the residential or fostering service, if the child is looked after)
- Health practitioners
- A police representative

Other relevant practitioners will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include:

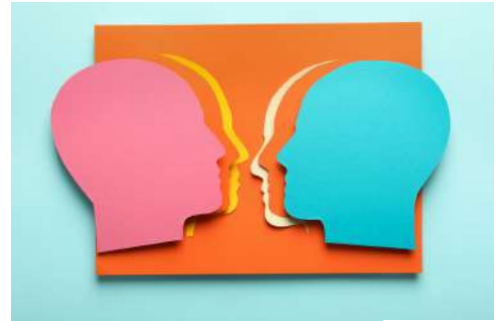
- The practitioner or agency which made the referral.
- The child's school or nursery.
- Any health or care services the child or family members are receiving.
- Youth justice practitioner and/or youth worker.
- Adult mental health, substance misuse and/or domestic abuse specialist.
- British Transport Police representative.

All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their organisation and agencies. They should be sufficiently skilled and experienced to prepare for and engage with the strategy discussion and be able to critically assess and challenge their own and others' input.

## Strategy Discussions

### Where should a strategy discussion be held?

The preferred option is to hold strategy discussions face to face where possible. Strategy discussions can also be held virtually or by telephone. Face to face strategy discussions are likely to be more effective in complex types of abuse or neglect.



### What are the roles of different agencies in a strategy discussion?

#### Children's Social Care

- Convene the strategy discussion.
- Make sure that the strategy discussion considers the child's welfare and safety and identifies whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
- Make sure that the strategy discussion decides what information should be shared with the child and family. Information should not be shared if this may place the child at risk of harm or jeopardise a police investigation. The rationale must be recorded if information related to the strategy discussion is not shared with parents and carers.
- Agree what further action is required, and who will do what, by when, where an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) is in place or the child is the subject of police powers of protection.
- Record agreed decisions in accordance with local recording procedures.

Follow up actions to make sure that actions are progressed and completed.

#### Health Providers

- Advise about the appropriateness or otherwise of medical assessments and explain the holistic health benefits, including ensuring assessment of previously unmanaged health matters that may be further evidence of neglect or maltreatment.
- Provide and co-ordinate any specific information from relevant health practitioners to assist strategy and decision-making. This may include information related to family health, maternity health, school health, mental health, domestic abuse and violence and substance misuse.
- Secure additional expert advice and support from named and/or designated professionals for more complex cases following preliminary strategy discussions.
- Arrange for appropriate examinations or observations, and further investigations or tests, to determine how the child's health or development may be impaired.

#### Police

- Discuss the basis for any criminal investigation, including both reactive (where there is evidence to suggest a crime has been committed) and proactive (where further activity is required to establish if a crime has occurred), investigation and any relevant processes that other organisations and agencies might need to know about, including the timing and methods of evidence gathering.
- Lead the criminal investigation (local authority children's social care has the lead for the section 47 enquiries and assessment of the child's welfare).

# Strategy Discussions

## What are the possible outcomes of a strategy discussion?

| Outcome 1  | Outcome 2  | Outcome 3   |
|--|--|---|
| The threshold for a section 47 enquiry is not met. If the case is already open then involvement will continue. On a new case, a decision may be made to complete an assessment, refer to early help or take no further action. | Commencement or continuation of a section 47 investigation without a police investigation.<br><br>Commencement of a single agency investigation led by police with no involvement from children's services.<br><br><i>Where this outcome is decided in a strategy discussion, the child(ren) should be seen within 24 hours.</i> | Joint police and children's services enquiries/ assessment under section 47.<br><br><i>Where this outcome is decided in a strategy discussion, the child(ren) should be seen within 24 hours.</i> |



## What happens if there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47?

If it is decided that there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, the following decisions will need to be made:

- What further information is needed if an assessment is already underway and how it will be obtained and recorded.
- What immediate and short-term action is required to support the child, and who will do what by when.
- Whether legal action is required.

## Strategy Discussion Checklist – Key Questions

### Compliance with Working Together 2023

- Are representatives from police, social care and health in attendance?

### What are the risks to the child/children?

This is supported by using the multi-agency [Thresholds Chart](#) to provide a clear narrative of the risk.

- Who is concerned and what are the nature of their concerns?
- What is the impact of the concern on the child or children?
- What is the likely impact on the child or children if nothing changes?
- Are there any other children that need to be considered?

### Is there a need for immediate, supportive, protective or legal action?

What form of action needs to be taken and what is the rationale for the action?

## Strategy Discussions

- What needs to happen to reduce or manage risk for this child and how can we support this?
- Is the threshold for significant harm met and section 47 enquiries to be undertaken?
- Does there need to be an assessment under section 17 of the Children Act?
- Can the needs of the child and family be responded to by Early Help?

### Does the child need a Child Protection Medical to enable a holistic health assessment?

- What might the unmet physical or mental health needs be for the child?
- Do timescales allow for collection of forensic evidence?

### Does there need to be a police investigation?

- What is the order of actions if section 47 enquiries and a criminal investigation are to take place simultaneously?

### Is there any other information required and from whom?

- What further information is needed and how will this be obtained or recorded?
- When will the child be seen alone and by whom, for example, by the social worker (unless inappropriate for the child)?
- How will the child's voice be ascertained? This includes gaining an understanding of their lived experience.
- Will an interpreter be required if English is not the preferred language of the child and their family?
- What assistance can be given to a child who has difficulties communicating because of a disability or age?

### Does there need to be a referral to any other agency?

- Which agency involvement is required to best meet the needs of the child and family?

### What is the extent of the parents/carers and child/ children's awareness of the situation?

- What engagement with the parents or carers is appropriate at this time?
- Is there anything that needs to be communicated to the child?



### Next steps – The plan moving forward

- Do the parents or any other adults require restrictions on contact with or care of the children?
- Is a further strategy discussion required?
- What is the agreed safety plan at this time?